



The One Thing I Wish I Would Have Known About The GMAT Before I Took It

20 GMAT Club members share their stories, thoughts, inspiration, and advice.

INTRODUCTION

The road to your business school education can feel like a long one, especially when you're only on the first step. Preparing for the GMAT can be a daunting task, no matter where you're from, where you went to undergrad, or how comfortable you are taking tests. No matter how you look at it, the test is just challenging.

But you don't have to do it alone.

That's why I created the GMAT Club back in 2002. I discovered a community of people hungry to share and grow during the formative time leading up to B-school.

Years later, I've attended and graduated from B-school, but I still love the community of people on the cusp of a big life. And the GMAT is one of the first steps of that process.

Everyone prepares for it differently, but I think you benefit from listening to others. So I asked our community one important question: **"What do you wish you would have known before taking the GMAT?"**

Their answers surprised and delighted me.

And I hope they do for you, too.

~bb
GMAT 750 (49, 42)
Founder, GMAT Club

1. JKO, GMAT 760 (Q49, V46)

I wish I had known, at the time, how small the GMAT is as a portion of the MBA application process.

The GMAT is your everything, until you actually take it. I haven't thought about the GMAT in three months, and I took the GMAT about three months ago. And sure it's important to do well, but I had it built up as THE barrier between me and a solid business school. It's not; it's a bump along the way. **Take your time, prepare adequately, or exceptionally, but then go take it and move on.**

I missed the first question on the GMAT because I so stressed and anxious that I totally locked up and couldn't think. If I had known then what I know now, I would have been a lot more relaxed.

2. Whiplash2411, GMAT 760 (Q50, V44)

There is no one formula that works for everyone who studies for the GMAT. It is very important to realize this as you scroll through the forums and there are people who studied for two weeks and ended up with a 750 and people who slogged for 4 months and only made a 600.

It is important to treat the GMAT as an ever-changing opponent and be prepared, and understand that this can mean very different things for each person. In the end, it is even more important to realize that the GMAT is but one part of your application, and never give up.

3. Moss, GMAT 760 (Q49, V45)

Take practice tests earlier and throughout the GMAT study process. I was discouraged early on with my performance on practice tests and thought the best approach was to spend as much of my time studying and doing OG programs as possible. I waited until a week before test day to take my first real CAT. I was totally rushed, got flustered by the whole process, and did terribly. I took me awhile to adjust to the CAT setting (e.g., if you start doing well, your

problems become consistently difficult with no respite). I ended up being rushed in both quant and verbal during my first time taking the GMAT and performing below expectations.

My second time through taking the GMAT I made sure to frequently take CATs throughout my study process. It not only improved my timing and test form (ability to withstand difficult problem after difficult problem without fatigue), but the metrics many of the CATs product allowed me to identify weaknesses. It also helped me to realize when I simply had to move on from a problem I didn't know and go to the next -- it was very difficult for me at first to "admit defeat" on a problem, but **there is simply not enough time to work through something you don't know**. Ultimately, the best way to do practice problems is through a CAT -- it's the most realistic and useful type of practice problem one can do. So my best GMAT advice would be to take CATs early and often!

4. Cheetarah1980, GMAT 710 (Q48, V40)

I wish I would've taken the 2nd GMATPrep practice test. I'd taken the 1st one more than 6 months prior to taking the test and didn't quite remember the types of questions it covered.

I found the Verbal section of the actual GMAT to be much more difficult than my practice tests because the questions were asked in ways I hadn't seen. So those two GMATPrep tests are critical, especially as the test date nears.

5. LostTraveler, GMAT 710 (Q49, V38)

Quite frankly, the one thing I wish I did prior to beginning my prep was to **do a real self-assessment and reality check**. Coming out of college at the top of my class and breezing through nearly all my courses, I figured the GMAT was going to be a push-over to get a 700+ score.

I had decided to go to b-school and had scheduled to take my exam just 3 weeks later, but once I took the assessment at the beginning of the OG it was like my world was upside down. I had to reschedule for 3 *months* later and enrolled in Manhattan GMAT course.

6. Golantrevize, GMAT 770

I wish I knew the GMAT is all about good preparation and pattern recognition! Your score is directly proportional to how well-prepared you are, and by that I mean how well you can recognize patterns. It is all about recognizing the patterns of questions they ask, and the answers they expect (even if in some cases you may not agree with them). With sufficient and smart practice, one can get a good handle over the patterns and score well.

For example, SC questions are all about which rules they look for. The same holds true for CR - what are the traps, what are the fallacies, what kind of logical connections can you make.

You can gain a good understanding of these "patterns" by practicing, and more importantly evaluating each and every question you practiced, especially from the OG, verbal review and quant review. Analyzing the answer to each question in those 3 books (and GMAT prep of course), and the explanation for why the wrong answers are eliminated, are of paramount importance. Ideally, get done with the other practice material in the initial periods of preparation, to get familiarized with the concepts, and focus on these 3 books in the second half of your prep time. That way, you have a solid understanding of the fundamentals, and are ready to take on the real deal.

Keeping a log with key concepts, and mistakes you repeat on tests also helps a lot in improving the score.

7. Lala10

Test center stress is real. I read a lot of threads on how people score 700+ during practices, etc. but can't seem to perform on the real thing. I think most of it has to do with the fact that you're getting fingerprinted, picture taken, signing in/out, etc. It's very unnerving and contributes to nervousness. **Don't underestimate the test center environment.**

Write the AWAs when taking practice exams! The hour of writing does drain you a bit and you need to have that feeling before going into the real exam.

8. Cfavreau, GMAT 730 (Q48, V42)

Do NOT wait until a week before the actual test date to take GMAT Prep 1 (even if you are taking other CAT exams - there is a difference between tests).

Do NOT spend three full days learning and digesting combinatorics (unless you can already solve ALL the quant questions in ALL the OG's).

Do NOT memorize thousands of idioms (there are about ten you need to memorize or know, for the rest you should solve by substituting X and Y in the sentence as the OG's do in their explanations - this is assuming English is your native language).

Do NOT underestimate the amount of time it takes to prepare - I thought one month full time would be enough, I was wrong, and felt unprepared going into the exam, but fortunately I believe "Luck" was on my side on test day.

Do NOT waste your time on ANY "advanced material" until AFTER you go through the OG's, THEN move onto the difficult stuff (I'm starting to feel a bit redundant).

Lastly, **I wish I would have discovered this forum much earlier in my course of study. The debriefs were invaluable.**

9. GaryDunn

Before my first attempt at the GMAT, I took a brief evening brush-up course that lasted seven sessions and that used the OG (11th) for the course material at the University where I received my two BS degrees. Then I went and took the test--I did not pass with a respectable score. So, I waited awhile, maybe six months, to take the test again. Meanwhile, I would study the OG again on my own to see if I could score higher. To my dismay, I scored 40 points lower than my first score. These two failures put on path really study the material in earnest. So the search began.

The first tool I found was GMATClub.com. I had no idea that this forum existed, but I am glad it does. I began reading many of the threads on this forum and found that most of the participants here have great conceptual knowledge

on variety of topics. I could see how much conceptual knowledge I really am lacking. Next, I ordered the complete Manhattan book set for the 12th OG. As I work through this material, I can see how failure was all but assured in my first two attempt on the test.

This being said, **I would have liked to have known how conceptual the test was before I took it the first time.** I guess business schools use the test to gauge how well a candidate will be able to rationalize and solve today's modern problems.

10. Sampo, GMAT 730 (Q49, V40)

I wish I had written the essays on my practice GMAT exams for a couple of reasons. First, on the real GMAT, I ended up not finishing my essays (I took too much time planning and making them sound good) and ended up losing point on the AWA.

Second, I didn't end up having the full-on "simulated GMAT" feel until the day of the test. As a result, I ended up not being prepared for the onset of the mental fatigue during my verbal section, so I scored my lowest ever on that.

You really have no idea how the GMAT really feels and how mentally exhausting it can be until you actually DO the AWA section. I know a lot of people skip it in practice, just like I did, but it was a big mistake.

11. PaulAllen, GMAT 680 (Q46, V38)

I wish I knew how much it pays to drill and drill and drill your weak areas.

12. WillIGetMyLifeBack

I wish I wouldn't have taken the test before completing all the MGMAT tests, before going through all the official books and I **wish I would not have stressed out a night before.**

13. Vorskl, GMAT 710 (Q49, V38)

I should have took a piece of paper and answer three "simple" questions:

- Why an MBA?
- Why now?
- What's next?

After spending 2-4-6 months answering these questions, I would have had superior motivation to study GMAT and write essays.

14. AliceGMAT

I wish I would have had a better understanding of how the scoring algorithm works so I could let go, especially for the Quant section. The exam isn't like paper tests that we're used to.

Being an engineer and being good at math without preparing, I was confident about this section. I was very, very good while solving the OG and could solve the GMAT Prep tests without really having to guess!

My strategy in quant was to get EVERY question correct (like in a paper-based test). And yet, there I was on the real exam, stuck up on a question for a couple of minutes. Not only did that end up in a time management disaster but it also made me nervous (because I had not expected this situation to arise).

For the verbal section, you can usually work through most of the questions by elimination method. So the strategy is pretty much to select the best one out of the given choices. Being stuck on a question is rather rare.

But things go wrong with Quant. If you don't know the answer, you have to guess or move on. I think this is very important for you to know, irrespective of what score he targets or his level of preparation, as it comes into play at all score levels, for every test-taker.

15. Yogesh1984, GMAT 680 (Q49, V34)

For the Verbal section: **practice hard, give yourself good amount of time** (if you are not too comfortable then it would be good to start from basics to advanced, gradually) and try to learn even from the questions you answered correctly. This is important as more often than not we are stuck with questions when none of the options really make sense!

For the Quant section: **You must use pen and paper.** Do not try to solve each and every thing in your mind even if you can do so, because of many reasons- Test is too long, keep some energy for the later part of the test, and chances of missing a DS questions is high in some cases.

16. Hoogly

Before you even start your prep, **take a couple of weeks to zero in on books, tests, advanced practice and one good forum** that helps you in almost all possible ways (such as GMAT Club). Do some research on what's best for you! Spend you bucks wisely on the most innovative and generally recommended material and courses. Gather all your resources, identify a target date for your GMAT, make a study Plan and then... oh yes start studying!

Pre-Study weeks:

Spend a week or two doing some R & D work for above basic requirements. Once you are satisfied, that you have all enough resources & help, start your GMAT journey! This helps in preventing hiccups in middle of journey owing to some parameters like bad or non-Gmat specific material, bad experiences with non-recognized prep courses and most importantly it saves your hard earned money!

Only once this is done, then you can sit and study, keeping a timeline for your preparation (say, 2 or 3 months from now). This will avoid precious time during your prep weeks which may otherwise you might end up spending on book, material & prep reviews! I ended up spending my precious hours doing this in the middle of my prep journey. Only if I had known this earlier!

17. Vamsigmat2012

Wish I would have known that **the endurance to sit for a four-hour test is as important as the knowledge required** for the GMAT.

18. Ebonn101, GMAT 750 (Q43, V51)

I wish I knew how the new integrated reasoning section will be weighted in terms of its significance compared to AWA and Q/V.

19. RGL, GMAT 590 (Q47, V25)

I felt that I didn't apply any strategy/process consciously during the test and later got dismal 590. Now, I'm again prepping for GMAT and **learning to apply the PROCESS no matter how much pressure I'm under during the test.**

So I think mantra is definitely to "learn the process" and apply it during the test.

20. CharmWithSubstance, GMAT 770 (Q50, V46)

I wish I would have known how much difference preparation makes. A lot of people told me the GMAT measures your intellectual ability and there's only so much you can do to practice.

It wasn't until the end of my quant preparation that I realized how many patterns you start seeing when you've done thousands of problems. Not many people feel that quant problems are predictive, but when you do enough they become predictable.

About GMAT Club

Every year, brilliant minds of business school applicants develop strategies, research school information, and master interviews, only for the same process to be repeated the following year by a new applicant pool.

In 2002, **GMAT Club was formed to help preserve the collective knowledge of MBA students – to contribute to each other's learning.**

Through information sharing and the development of new resources, it is our goal to improve the Business School application process.

GMAT Club members always get the best prices through our discounts for prep courses, programs, consulting, books, and more.

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